

San Luis Obispo County
Department of Planning and Building

Concept Paper
Residential Development Standards

October 2005

Executive Summary

When the County's Housing Element was approved, the Board of Supervisors authorized staff to begin implementing its programs. One of these programs involved reviewing the County's residential development standards to determine if changes could be made to assist in the production of additional housing. Staff has reviewed the following Land Use Ordinance sections: setbacks, parking, height, minimum site area, minimum parcel size, intensity factor for multi-family dwellings, allowable density(floor area ratio/open area ratio), lot consolidation and standards for manufactured housing to see if modifications could be made to meet the goals of the program. The following are preliminary recommendations.

Setbacks

Revise the Land Use Ordinance to allow a 20 foot front setback on properties that are less than one acre and are designated Residential Single Family or Residential Multi-Family.

Parking

Revise the Land Use Ordinance to reduce the number of required guest parking spaces by one space, on developments of 15 units or less, in the Residential Multi-Family land use category.

Height

No change recommended at this time.

Minimum site area

Modify Section 22.10.110C (Minimum site area)of the Land Use Ordinance allow 4000 square feet for two units in the multi-family land use category.

Minimum parcel size

No change recommended at this time

Intensity factor for multi-family dwellings

No change recommended at this time.

Allowable Density/floor area ratio/open area ratio

Modify the Land Use Ordinance to eliminate maximum floor area and maximum open area and establish instead a lot coverage ratio for low, medium and high density residential development.

Lot Consolidation

Complete a more detailed review of this issue for consideration at a future date.

Manufactured housing

Modify the Land Use Ordinance to prohibit mobilehomes not certified under National Manufactured Housing Construction and Safety Act of 1974

Purpose

When the County's Housing Element was approved in July of 2004, the Board of Supervisors authorized staff to begin implementing programs to encourage development of housing to meet the needs of all county residents, particularly those in the low and moderate income groups. One of these programs (Program HE 1.4) involves revisions to the County's residential development standards for Single Family Residential (RSF) and Multi-Family Residential (RMF) housing to encourage well-designed housing at relatively high residential densities (10-26 units/acre). The primary purpose is to reduce constraints to high density housing, with emphasis on locations where residents can use alternatives to private automobiles.

Approach

To implement this program, our approach is to identify and potentially revise development standards that may be unnecessarily hindering residential single and multi-family projects. We are also looking for ways to introduce flexibility where it's needed. As a result, we may be removing standards or adding new standards to achieve the goals of the program.

With this approach in mind, County staff has reviewed ordinances from surrounding counties and some cities to compare our basic development standards with what other counties, and some cities, are doing. The standards reviewed include the following: setbacks, parking, height, minimum site area, minimum parcel size, intensity factor for multi-family dwellings, allowable density (floor area ratio/open area ratio, lot consolidation and standards for manufactured housing.

Setbacks

Most jurisdictions have a standard set of property line setbacks and then allow exceptions in certain instances. For example, San Luis Obispo County allows exceptions or adjustments for shallow lots, sloping lots and to be consistent with established development that was built to a different setback. Many jurisdictions also have Planned Unit Development (PUD) or similar ordinances that allow all setbacks to be adjusted if the project meets certain other development standards. Typically PUD type projects will also need a public hearing before the Planning Commission. The following is a summary of standard setbacks for the jurisdictions reviewed.

County of San Luis Obispo

RSF - Front - 25ft; Side - 5ft; Rear - 10ft

RMF - Front - 25ft, Side - 5ft, Rear - 10ft

* Side and rear setback extend to 30' on sites larger than one acre

County of Santa Barbara

RSF - Front - 20ft, Side - 5ft, Rear - 25ft

RMF - Front - 20ft, Side - 5ft, Rear - 25ft

* a 15 foot rear setback is allowed if adjacent to open space.

County of Ventura

RSF- Front – 20ft, Side - 5ft, Rear - 15ft

RMF- Front – 20ft, Side.- 5ft, Rear - 15ft

County of Monterey

RSF - Front - 20ft, Side - 5ft, Rear - 10ft

RMF - Front - 20ft, Side - 5ft, Rear - 10ft “ “ “

County of Santa Cruz

RSF – Front - 20ft, Side - 5ft, Rear - 15ft

RMF – Front - 20ft, Side, - 5ft, Rear - 15ft “ “ “

Staff also reviewed the ordinances of three cities: City San Luis Obispo, City of Santa Rosa and the City of Petaluma to compare requirements in higher density areas. Both the City of San Luis Obispo and City of Santa Rosa allow 20 foot front setbacks in RSF and RMF developments. The city of Petaluma will allow 15 feet in some instances. Side and rear setbacks are comparable to other areas.

Several of the jurisdictions have Planned Development Ordinances which allow setbacks and other standards to be set through a conditional use permit process. San Luis Obispo County currently allows front setbacks to be modified as part of cluster division or condominium projects.

Preliminary Recommendation

San Luis Obispo County has a slightly larger front setback than is required elsewhere. A twenty foot setback would allow more flexibility for builders, without significantly affecting the appearance of the neighborhood or access to the dwelling. Staff proposes to revise the Land Use Ordinance to allow a 20 foot front setback on properties that are less than one acre and are designated Residential Single Family or Residential Multi Family

Parking

The approach other jurisdictions take to parking standards is less uniform than their approach to setbacks. In the single family zoning category, most jurisdictions require 2 spaces per unit. However, some require more for larger single family dwellings with 4 or more bedrooms. Ventura County and Santa Cruz County's are two that require additional spaces for larger houses.

In the multi-family category, 1 space for a one bedroom unit, 2 spaces for a 2 bedroom unit and 2.5 spaces for a three bedroom unit is common. Monterey County and Santa Barbara County both have requirements for duplexes and triplexes that are slightly different from other multi-family projects, such as apartments. Monterey County also has different requirements for condominium projects. Guest parking is typically 1 space per four five units.

San Luis Obispo County requires 1 space per one bedroom; 1.5 spaces per 2 bedroom unit and 2 spaces per 3 bedroom unit. Guest parking requirements are 1 space + 1 space per 4 units. It appears that other jurisdictions don't require this extra guest parking space. However some, such as Santa Barbara and Monterey

counties, require an additional ½ space on 2 bedroom units, which makes up for the guest space that was not required. Others don't require the extra guest space at all.

Overall, San Luis Obispo County is not out of line with other jurisdictions on parking requirements. However, due to the guest parking calculation, we may require more parking than other jurisdictions on smaller projects, depending on the project. While San Luis Obispo County is similar to other jurisdictions, parking is still a limiting factor to higher density development.

Parking requirements are particularly difficult for multi-family projects on existing small lots. For example, at medium density, a 6000 square foot lot could accommodate three, 2 bedroom units. These units would need a total of 7 spaces under current regulations. By reducing the current guest parking requirement to 1 space per four units, the County would be consistent with other jurisdictions and remove one space from the current requirement. This would make smaller projects more feasible and could result in more multi-family housing being built. The tradeoff would be some additional impacts to off-site parking(street) because guests will be more likely to park on the street. Limiting the parking reduction to existing legal lots and smaller, non-discretionary, projects would help to reduce the impacts on any given neighborhood.

Preliminary Recommendation:

The County will revise the Land Use Ordinance to reduce the number of required guest parking spaces by one space, for projects of 15 units or less, in the Residential Multi-Family land use category.

Height

San Luis Obispo County, Monterey County, Santa Barbara County and Ventura all have a maximum height limit of 35 feet, with Ventura requiring larger setbacks to get to 35 feet. Santa Cruz allows 28 feet without a special use permit. San Luis Obispo County has a 35 foot limit in multi-family with 45 feet allowed if specific standards for "high intensity" development are met. These include: location on a collector or arterial, community sewer service and located within 1000 of the Central Business District of the community. Heights to 45 feet also are allowed by conditional use permit, if specific findings met and if side, rear and interior setbacks are increased by 1 foot for every foot of additional height above 35 feet.

Height requirements can be a limiting factor to higher density multi-family development. However, staff is not recommending a change in the height limit because there is sufficient flexibility in the County Land Use Ordinance to allow for additional height if necessary.

Preliminary Recommendation:

No change recommended at this time.

Minimum Site Area

Section 22.10.110 establishes the minimum site area for which a building permit will be issued. Minimum site area differs from minimum parcel size in that minimum site area applies to existing legal parcels while minimum parcel size applies to newly created parcels. For single family residential and multi family residential the minimums are as follows:

Land Use	Minimum Site Area
Single Family Residential	1750 square feet*
Multi-Family Residential	6000 square feet for 2 units*

* One acre is required for well and septic on the same lot.

Minimum site area is used differently among, the jurisdictions reviewed. Ventura County, like San Luis Obispo County, distinguishes between minimum site area and minimum parcel size, allowing 3500 square feet for minimum site area. Others, such as Monterey County and Santa Cruz appear to use minimum parcel size. However, they have a lower minimum parcel size for both single and multi-family. Monterey County allows 5000 square feet in higher density areas and Santa Cruz County allows 4000 square feet in some instances. The City of Petaluma allows a minimum parcel size as low as 3000 square feet in both zoning categories, The City of Santa Rosa ranges from 4500–7000 square feet.

The 1750 square feet allowed by San Luis Obispo County for minimum site in residential single family appears to be the most generous of any of the jurisdictions. However, in the multi-family category, several jurisdictions allow less than the 6000 square feet allowed by San Luis Obispo County. Allowing a smaller minimum site area for multi-family projects would make numerous older legal lots in existing communities buildable and increase the inventory of multi-family housing. At medium density, a 4,000 square foot site would allow two units. A 4,000 square foot minimum site area, coupled with the parking reduction may increase the number of multi- family developments.

Preliminary Recommendation:

Modify Section 22.10.110C (Minimum site area)of the Land Use Ordinance allow 4000 square feet for two units in the multi-family land use category.

Minimum Parcel Size

Minimum parcel size the smallest size parcel that can be created under the land use category without using special provisions, such as a density bonus Ordinance. San Luis Obispo County uses 6,000 square feet in both single family residential and multi-family residential. Monterey county has a 6000 square foot minimum for lower density single family residential districts and a 5,000 square foot minimum for their high density residential district. Santa Barbara county takes a somewhat different approach. In their single family areas they have standard residential districts and exclusive residential districts. A 6,000- 20,000 square foot parcel size would be typical in the standard district. The exclusive districts run up to five acre minimum's with special development standards.

Santa Barbara County has provisions in the multi-family category for lot sizes ranging from 7,000 square feet to 30,000 square feet with an additional unit allowed for each 1,000 square feet of lot area. Ventura County uses 6,000 square feet for single family and 7,000 square feet for multi-family. Santa Cruz county ranges from 4,000 square feet to 6000 square feet depending on the district.

Minimum parcels sizes in San Luis Obispo County are similar to those in surrounding counties. In the single family category, only Monterey County has a lower minimum of 5000 square feet. However this only applies to limited areas. In the multi-family category, San Luis Obispo County has a slightly lower minimum parcel size compared to Santa Barbara and Ventura. Santa Cruz County has a slightly lower minimum in the multi-family category in specific areas.

County staff is not recommending a change to the minimum parcel size. The current minimum of 6000 square feet is reasonable for the single family category. Developer's wanting a smaller parcel size can request a density bonus by providing lower cost housing. This approach can result in a minimum parcel size as low as 3900 square feet.

For the multi-family category, 6000 square feet is actually smaller than would be typically requested. Most multi-family projects use allowed density in the multi-family category to create Planned Development projects that result in very small lots with some common area. In these cases the underlying parcel is often significantly larger than 6,000 square feet.

Preliminary Recommendation

No change at this time.

Intensity factor for multi-family dwellings.

In San Luis Obispo County the number of multiple family dwellings allowed on a single lot or adjoining lots is based upon the "intensity factor" of the site. The intensity factor will be low, medium or high, based upon the type of street serving the site, the sewer service provided, and the distance of the site from the central business district. The intensity factor is the lowest obtained from any of the following criteria:

Criteria		Intensity Factor		
Type of road access		Low	Medium	High
	Unpaved road	X		
	Paved local street		X	
	Paved collector or arterial (1)			X
Sewer service	On-site septic	X		

Criteria		Intensity Factor		
	Community sewer			X
Distance from CBD (2)	More than 1 mile	X		
	1 mile or less		X	
	Less than 1000 ft.			X

Notes:

1. Site access may be from a cross street if the site abuts a collector or arterial.
2. Straight line access from the central business district.

The criteria for determining intensity in San Luis Obispo County are subsequently used to establish maximum density. They set geographic and service boundaries for specific densities. Other counties establish density through identifying and mapping geographic districts for specific densities. While similar criteria may be used, they are not identified in the ordinances of each jurisdiction. Therefore, a useful comparison cannot be made.

Preliminary Recommendation

No change is recommended at this time.

Allowable Density(floor area ratio/open area)

.The allowable density, maximum floor area and minimum open area for a multiple-family project is shown in the following table (all area figures are expressed as percentages of the total usable site area). A minimum of six thousand square feet of site area is required to establish more than one dwelling unit, in compliance with Section 22.10.110.C (Minimum Site Area - Multi-Family Dwellings):

Intensity Factor	Maximum number of units per acre	Maximum floor area(1)	Maximum open area(2)
Low	15	35%	55%
Medium	26	48%	45%
High	38	65%	40%

Notes:

- (1) The gross floor area of all residential structures, including upper stories, but not garages and carports.
- (2) Includes required setbacks, and all areas of the site except buildings and parking spaces.

Multi-family densities allowed in San Luis Obispo County are somewhat higher than other jurisdictions reviewed. For example, Santa Barbara County and Ventura County allow up to 30 units per acre in their high density districts. The City of San Luis Obispo allows 12(low), 18(medium) and 24(high) units per acre respectively.

A limiting factor in San Luis Obispo County that is not present in the residential standards of other jurisdictions is the Floor Area Ratio(FAR) calculation. The FAR limits the amount of floor area allowed per lot at various densities. For example, at low density the FAR is only 35% of the lot. This means that the total floor area of all residential structures cannot equal more than 35% of the lot area. This requirement is particularly difficult for multiple story buildings and therefore limits higher density developments. Other jurisdictions use a lot coverage ratio which includes the foot print of the residential structures and accessory structures. The lot coverage allowance varies anywhere from 30% to 60% depending on the zoning district. Higher density districts allow more lot coverage.

Preliminary Recommendation

Modify the Land Use Ordinance to eliminate maximum floor area and maximum open area and establish instead a lot coverage ratio for low, medium and high density residential development.

Lot Consolidation

In any residential or rural lands land use category, any single ownership of two or more adjoining vacant lots with continuous frontage, shall be considered a single parcel of real property except as otherwise provided by this section. No sale or transfer, or division of less than all of such single parcel shall occur unless the portion or portions of the single parcel to be sold, transferred or divided, are in conformity with the provisions of this Title as modified by this section.

Type of Water and Sewer System	Minimum Lot Area	Minimum Lot Width
Community sewer and approved water system	3,500 sqft	40 ft
Septic system and community water	6,000 sqft	50 ft
Septic system and domestic well	1 acre	50 ft

Throughout San Luis Obispo County, there are many communities with lots that are 25x100 square feet. These are often legal lots because they were established legally by a recorded map. While they are legal lots they are not always legal building sites under the county's lot consolidation ordinance.

The lot consolidation ordinance seeks to combine vacant lots under common ownership to establish a minimum lot area and width for building purposes. Without the lot consolidation ordinance, the standards for minimum site area would apply to these lots. For example, someone with two vacant and adjacent 25x100 foot lots in the single family residential land use category would have one building site under lot consolidation. Without lot consolidation, two building sites would exist because each 2500 square foot lot would meet the minimum site area standards. Modifying the lot consolidation standards could create building sites out of many small lots throughout the county.

Preliminary Recommendation

Complete a more detailed review of this issue for consideration at a future date.

Standards for Manufactured Housing

San Luis Obispo county allows individual mobilehomes to be installed in the same locations as conventional houses as long as the mobilehome complies with all county standards for single family dwellings and specific standards are met. These include:

1. Certification under the National Manufactured Housing Construction and Safety Act of 1974; and
2. Installation a permanent foundation or a foundation system in compliance with Section 18551 of the California Health and Safety Code.
3. Exterior Design Standards as follows:
 - a. Siding Materials. Exterior siding (excluding windows) shall consist of non-reflective materials designed to resemble wood, stucco, rock, masonry or concrete block or other non-reflective, textured surface.
 - b. Roofing Materials. Roofs (excluding skylights) shall consist of non-reflective materials designed to resemble wood shakes, wood or composition shingles, tile, rock, sod, or metal with a baked-on color or other non-reflective, textured surface.
 - c. Roof Overhang. Roofs shall have eave and gable overhangs of not less than one foot as measured from the vertical side of the structure.

If a mobilehome proposed for a site does not satisfy the criteria specified in 1-3 above, the mobilehome becomes non-standard and Minor Use Permit approval is required before the project can go forward. Mobilehomes built before 1976 are not certified under the National Manufactured Housing Construction and Safety Act of 1974 and, therefore, always require a Minor Use Permit. Also, they do not comply with the design standards and special mitigation must also be established through the minor use permit process.

Other counties such as Ventura, Monterey and Santa Cruz, do not allow mobilehomes that are not certified under the 1974 Act. However, Ventura County does allow them for farm support quarters. While they are a source of more affordable housing, non-certified mobilehomes have fewer built in safety features than newer models and often are not in good condition due to their age. All are 30 years, old or older.

Preliminary Recommendation

Modify the Land Use Ordinance to prohibit mobilehomes not certified under National Manufactured Housing Construction and Safety Act of 1974